

# Stop Turkey from Bombing our Friends Fighting ISIS.



Kurdish (peshmerga) fighters at Bashik base, 25km from ISIS controlled Mosul.

Kurds have a saying 'Kurds have no friends but the mountains'. This time, let's make the saying wrong.

By Roj Welat

Kurds in Syria and Iraq have been the only ground-based allies against ISIS. While the US and its Coalition partners have bombed massively from the air, we know that there can be no defeat without 'boots on the ground', which is what the Kurds have provided with significant success. So why is Turkey, supposedly a member of the Coalition, bombing them? Why are we allowing Turkey to bomb them? Could we stop them if we really wanted to?

The PKK has been conducting a low grade civil rebellion in Turkey for 31 years, fighting for simple recognition

of their existence, which is denied in the Turkish Constitution. Innocents on both sides have been killed in this guerilla warfare, as well as Turkish soldiers and Kurdish rebels, but the vast majority of deaths have been of Kurdish civilians. The US and Europe have sided with Turkey and also labelled the PKK as 'terrorists'. A few months ago, President Erdogan started a 'peace process'. His statement that 'no more mothers should cry' was warmly welcomed by the rebels. Sadly, he has changed his mind.

On July 20, 2015, a group of young activists had gathered in the small

border town of Suruc, Turkey, to cross over into Kobani, the city in Syria that was so incredibly defended by Syrian Kurds against a sustained and brutal ISIS attack, but had been 80 percent destroyed in the process. These young people were either Kurds or their supporters and were going over to see how they could help. A suicide bomber attacked and killed 32 of them (another has died since). This bomber was ISIS but clear evidence has emerged that he was aided and abetted by the Turkish regime.

On July 24, to retaliate against this 'act of terrorism', Turkey started to

bomb the PKK both in southeast Turkey and in northern Iraq. Why would a terrorist attack on Turkish Kurds lead Turkey to start bombing other Turkish Kurds? Kurds were the victims, not the perpetrators. The answer lies in Turkish politics.

Erdogan has led Turkey for 13 years, first as Prime Minister of the AK party and more recently as President. He has made it very clear that he wants to alter the Constitution to give even greater power to his office of President. Turkey also has a limit of 10 percent of the electorate before a political party may sit in Parliament. Until the June, 2015, election, no Kurdish party had managed to break this barrier. In the last election, the HDP, a progressive party with Kurdish rights and responsibilities as its base, gained 13 percent of the vote and deprived the AKP of its majority in Parliament and its President Erdogan of his fervent wish for much, much more power. As a result, he is angry with the Kurds.

Token efforts to create a Coalition government with one of the other 3 parties, to no-one's surprise, have failed. There will now need to be another election and Erdogan hopes that by whipping up a 'war' with the Kurds, by creating a sense of lack of safety for the ordinary Turk, by attempting to blame the Kurds for the failure of the 'peace process', he will be able to steal back the votes AKP lost to HDP and win back his majority in Parliament. In such a scenario he would be able to attain his wish for a presidency far more powerful than that of the US President and with virtually no checks or balances.

While on paper Turkey is a member of the Coalition to oppose ISIS, the reality is that government sees the PKK as more dangerous than ISIS. This stance makes no sense. When did we ever hear of the PKK chopping off someone's head or capturing women and young girls, raping them and keeping or selling them as sex slaves? For the past two and a half years, its guns have been silenced as they sought a political resolution through the 'peace process'. There were no threats to disintegrate either Iraq or Syria. It is ISIS that is the huge threat to

regional stability and the reason for the formation of the 'Coalition'.

Turkey, or to be more specific, President Erdogan, is abusing its position as a member of the Coalition to attack the PKK instead of what other Coalition members see as its responsibility to attack ISIS. When Turkey first started its bombing campaign, in the first 2 days, they bombed 155 PKK targets and one ISIS warehouse. They arrested 1300 suspected 'terrorists', of whom some six to one were accused PKK sympathisers. The bombing of the PKK may indeed be illegal even under Turkish law. While Turkey joined the Coalition to fight ISIS before the election while the AKP still had a majority in Parliament, bombing the PKK started after the election, when

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Why should this matter to the US or its Coalition partners? All of the Kurdish militias, whether they are in Iraq, Syria or Turkey are the 'boots on the ground' without which the war against ISIS cannot be won. Turkish Kurds, the PKK, are closely affiliated with the Syrian Kurds and while Coalition members are certainly aware of this, they pretend not to be. Both Syrian and Turkish Kurds are the fighters who saved 150,000 Yezidis from

annihilation by ISIS on Mt. Sinjar.

Allowing Turkey to force the Kurds to fight on two fronts at once, the Turkish army and ISIS, clearly lessens the Kurdish capacity to fight ISIS. This helps ISIS and is not in the best interest of the whole world.

In addition, Turkey is attacking civilians. While they claim to be attacking PKK strongholds, 9 villagers who had no connection to the PKK were killed and 15 injured in a northern Iraqi village called Zergale that was bombed by Turkey on July 25. This incident has been investigated by Amnesty International. Lama Fakihi, Senior Crisis Advisor to AI visited the community and stated clearly that it was a 'flagrantly unlawful attack'. By saying nothing, the US becomes an accomplice to illegal acts.

As the international community we must intensify the campaign to stop President Erdogan's bombing campaign against our staunchest allies, the Kurds. Kurds have a fundamental human right to be recognised for who they are. It is nothing but the most blatant hypocrisy for the West to say, 'Kurds can be Kurds if we do not like the leader of the country in which they live (ie Saddam Hussein in Iraq, or Bashar al Assad in Syria) but they cannot be Kurds if we like or perhaps more honestly, have a use for, the leader of the country, (i.e. Turkey's Tayyip Erdogan).'

The ANC and the PLO were once considered to be terrorist organisations when all they were doing was fighting for the basic rights of their people. The causes of both of these organisations have now long been considered to be just. It is time to consider the same process for the PKK.

Finally, Africa should play a role in compelling Turkey to stop its bombing and murderous onslaught against the Kurds. The bombs are counterproductive in that: firstly, they divert and dilute the capacity of the Kurds, the only effective anti-ISIS force on the ground; and secondly, they are an international injustice. There is no doubt that the right sustained international pressure could stop the bombs.

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